

Eastern Meadowlark

Sturnella magna

STATUS

Threatened 

Not Listed 



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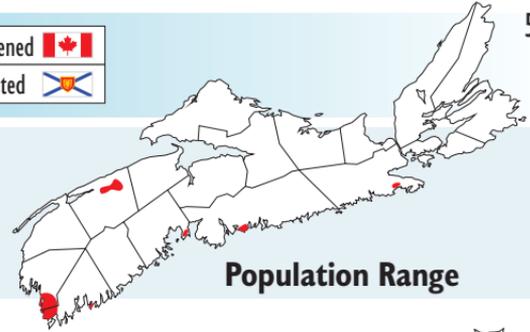
Species Description

The Eastern Meadowlark is a medium-sized songbird (22-28 cm long) with a long, pointed bill and a dark crown. It has a yellow throat and chest marked with a black “V” and a yellow patch between the upper bill and eye. There is a creamy line above the eye, and a dark line extending beyond the eye. Its back is a mottled brown, black and white. In flight, its white outer tail feathers become noticeable. Females are smaller and paler than males. Its song is a loud whistle of 3-5 notes.



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Rare in NS with recent breeding unconfirmed. Winters primarily in the southeastern USA.



Habitat

Found in open habitats including grasslands, hayfields, pasture, meadows, and some grain fields in areas with tall grass and limited amounts of shrubs and woody vegetation. It does best in larger continuous areas rather than small, fragmented patches. Circular cup nests with side entrances and a roof are built on the ground in June and are constructed of woven grass. It does not typically occupy corn, soybean, or wheat fields that employ more intensive farming methods.



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In Nova Scotia most Eastern Meadowlarks are typically observed in hayfields during breeding and low-lying coastal areas during migration.

Interesting Points

- Prior to the 1800s, this species occupied native prairie grasslands. Its population increased in distribution when forested land was cleared for agriculture during the 1800-1900s. Increased industrialized agricultural practices have made these habitats less suitable and this species has declined by 70% over the last 40 years in Canada. However, this species remains dependent on agricultural lands as most of its native grassland habitat (>80%) has now disappeared.
- This species was always rare in this province but once bred locally in hayfields of the Annapolis Valley. Recent breeding is unconfirmed in Nova Scotia.



Eastern Meadowlark nest

© NIVE ALLEN



Hatched nest

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Similar Species

Eastern Meadowlark colouration is conspicuous and not readily confused with any other species found in this province. It is almost identical in appearance to the Western Meadowlark, however this species is very infrequently observed in NS.

Red-winged Blackbird:

Females are a similar size and shape but they lack the bright yellow throat and belly.



Female Red-winged Blackbird

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Threats to Survival

- Grassland habitat loss and degradation (shift to intensive crops, farmland succession, and urbanization).
- Earlier and more frequent hay cutting and trampling by cattle (destruction of ground nests).
- High nest predation (foxes, cats, dogs, coyotes, raccoons, etc).
- Pesticide use on breeding and wintering grounds.



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How You Can Help

Report all sightings of this uncommon bird to eBird to document its presence if observed. Landowners can allow marginal areas of their property to seed with grass, which will provide nesting habitat for all grassland birds (maintain by mowing every 1-5 years). Delaying hay cutting until early July and keeping pasture areas ungrazed will help prevent nest destruction.



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Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or www.ec.gc.ca

Info: www.sararegistry.gc.ca, Bird Studies Canada: www.bsc-eoc.org, 1-888-448-2473

Sighting Reports: eBird.org, 1-866-727-3447, www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings

Stewardship: Learn about grassland restoration: Tallgrass Ontario, www.tallgrassontario.org 56